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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PHNOM PENH 000679

NOFORN
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KTIA](#) [TH](#) [CB](#)

SUBJECT: CAMBODIA-THAILAND BORDER: CAMBODIA WITHDRAWING
MOST TROOPS, PREPARING DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS, STILL CONCERNED
ABOUT REMAINING THAI TROOPS

REF: A. STATE 86724
[1](#)B. JAKARTA 1552
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 2428
[1](#)D. PHNOM PENH 664

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH A. MUSSOMELI FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador August 15 delivered Ref A demarche to Foreign Minister Hor Namhong, noting ongoing concerns about the troop presence in the vicinity of Preah Vihear temple and the need to continue to exercise restraint. Saying the U.S. did not support one side over the other, and noting recent reports of planned troop withdrawals as well as the scheduled August 18-19 bilateral FornMin talks in Thailand, the Ambassador emphasized that we support diplomatic efforts by both sides to resolve the border issues through bilateral channels, if at all feasible. Hor Namhong emphasized the need to remove all troops. He complained of a second Thai incursion that would have to be addressed in the August 18-19 bilateral talks with Thailand. He did not rule out UNSC consideration. Ambassador, echoing the Secretary, noted that UNSC consideration would be premature at this time, while not ruling it out altogether. Embassy learned that most troops should be withdrawn by 1600 on August 16. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador August 15 delivered Ref A demarche to Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hor Namhong, noting ongoing concerns about the troop presence in the vicinity of Preah Vihear temple and the need to continue to exercise restraint. Ambassador noted an identical demarche was being delivered in Bangkok. Saying the U.S. did not support one side over the other, and noting recent reports of planned troop withdrawals as well as the scheduled August 18-19 bilateral FornMin talks in Thailand, the Ambassador emphasized that we support diplomatic efforts by both sides to resolve the border issues through bilateral channels, if at all feasible.

Better to Remove All Troops

[1](#)3. (C) FM Hor Namhong confirmed that Cambodia and Thailand had agreed to withdraw all troops in the vicinity of the Keo Sikha Kiri Svava Pagoda (NOTE: sitting below Preah Vihear in disputed territory), except for ten soldiers each inside that

pagoda's walls and another 20 each in the area around the pagoda. He agreed that troops facing off against each other on disputed territory could lead to unexpected consequences: "With a stand-off like that, we don't know what could happen," he said. He noted, however, that in a July 28 meeting with Thai Foreign Minister Tej Bunnag, they had decided in principle to remove "all" troops from the area around Preah Vihear, but conceded that Cambodian Minister of Defense Secretary of State Gen. Neang Phat had made the agreement for removal of troops on the ground in meetings with Thai military counterparts on Aug. 12-13.

14. (C) Remarking on the positive bilateral step to remove troops, the Ambassador agreed that it would be best if all troops were withdrawn from the disputed territory, but emphasized the significance of reaching bilateral agreement. If the issues could not be resolved at the bilateral level, then we would support Cambodia working within the ASEAN context, he said.

A New Problem: Ta Moan Temple

15. (C) Hor Namhong expressed the RGC's desire to reach bilateral understanding on the Preah Vihear temple area. He said he would also be forced to raise a "new problem" on the border at the Prasart Ta Moan area 150 kilometers to the west of Preah Vihear, where Thai troops had dramatically increased their presence and entered on new territory in another overlapping border area. The Thai soldiers also constructed a fence and other structures on the disputed territory. Citing an August 14 letter to Thai Foreign Minister Tej Bunnag, he said the area was clearly within the territory of Cambodia, and he was now clarifying the situation with his

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Thai counterpart. "Like it or not, we must resolve this issue," during the August 18-19 talks, he said.

16. (C) Hor Namhong passed a copy of the letter which Post is transmitting to EAP/MLS. The claim to territory is based on 1908 minutes of the Commission for the Delimitation of Frontiers Between Indochina and Siam, referring to the "Route named Prasart Tamone." Citing good neighborliness and the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation the letter requests that Thailand: (1) remove the fence and new structures; (2) withdraw Thai troops from the area and pull down a military camp at the temple; and (3) return the temple complex area to the status quo ante "before being occupied by the Thai armed forces."

Diplomatic Commitment; Talk of UN

17. (C) On the August 18-19 talks in Hua Hin, Hor Namhong said that he would propose that the Joint Border Commission (JBC) be tasked with handling border discussions and that this be supplemented with legal experts' meetings. In the August 14 letter he also refers to "jurists from both sides" attempting to find a solution to the problem. Embassy understands from MOD sources that military leaders from both sides will participate in the Hua Hin talks to further elaborate on planned troop withdrawals. Minister of Defense Tea Bahn and MOD Secretary of State Neang Phat are part of the Cambodian delegation.

18. (C/NF) Hor Namhong said that negotiations would probably take "days and days" but that Cambodia was willing to "talk and talk and talk" to reach a resolution. Turning to the first bilateral FornMin talks on July 28, Hor Namhong averred that the prospect of UN Security Council consideration of the issue had "pushed (Thai PM) Samak into asking for the meeting between foreign ministers." Ambassador repeated that the U.S. believes it premature for the UN Security Council to consider this issue at this time and that resolving the border dispute bilaterally or with ASEAN would be better for

both sides. A bilateral solution would be one that both sides could live with for generations to come. Hor Namhong noted that UNSC consideration could not be entirely ruled out, but held out great hopes for the border dispute to proceed on a bilateral track.

Troops Moving on August 16

¶9. (C) MOD Secretary of State Gen. Neang Phat told A/DATT August 15 that he had negotiated the troop removals from the Keo Sikha Kiri Svaya Pagoda and that Cambodia would soon move its troops back to their barracks. The draw-down to ten troops for each side in the temple and 20 on the perimeter would commence at 1600 hours on August 16. Neang Phat added the withdrawals were in preparation for the talks the following Monday. RCAF Deputy Commander in Chief Gen Pol Saroeun told A/DATT mid-day that there may be some troop withdrawals from the Ta Moan area, as well.

Comment:

¶10. (C) We are heartened by indicators of positive progress made over the past few days, which suggests the two sides are close to removing most of the troops. The position that all troops should be removed and that the border area be returned to the status quo ante before July 15 remains the most responsible approach to achieving a bilateral diplomatic solution. However, until all troops are actually re-deployed, the situation could easily deteriorate to the tense stand-offs seen just after armed Thai military might entered onto land long occupied by Cambodia.

MUSSOMELI